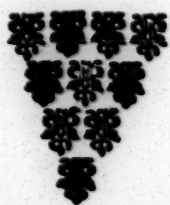


A SHORT
DISCOURSE
CONCERNING
MIRACLES,

In a LETTER to a FRIEND.



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SIR,

A Late Ingenious *Dialogue concerning Miracles*, hath given Occasion to several to turn their thoughts upon that Subject, which deserves, indeed, a Serious Meditation; seeing our Religion in part, is grounded upon the Divine Authority of Miracles. The differences of Opinions upon this Subject, arise chiefly from the Notion and Definition of a Miracle in general, which by that Learned Author, is thus Stated: A Miracle, he says, is an *Extraordinary Operation of GOD, against the known Course and settled Laws of Nature, appealing to the Senses.*

This Definition may be so explain'd, as to be true in one sense or other; but it seems to anticipate too much, and take that as it were for granted, which is likely to be the chief Matter of Dispute. When two Parties disagree about the Notion of that which is to be the Subject of their Discourse, they may wrangle long, and

come to no Issue. Therefore in such a Case, it seems to be the fairest way, to give at first, such a general Description of the Subject to be examined, as both Parties may agree in; and when they come to differ about particulars, then to argue and give reasons respectively for their difference, whether it be by restraining what they think too lax and general, or by supplying what they think defective.

At our Entrance upon this Discourse, we may take such a general Description of a Miracle as this, 'tis the Work of a Superiour Power, and unaccountable to us from Natural Causes. In this rough Draught of a Miracle, I think all Parties would pretty well agree: To some possibly, it may seem too lax and indeterminate; others may think it in some respect defective: However, upon a distinct Explanation of it, it will better appear where the fault lies, and what may be added or detracted from it to make it more just.

I have not made mention of a *Divine Power* or Operation in the Description of a Miracle in general, because I do not think that immediately necessary in every Miracle. That, indeed, is the main Question to be Examined in this Controversie: But if they mean by a *Divine Power*, an *Omnipotent Power*, as they seem to do, and that nothing less can work a Miracle; they will meet with many Instances and Matters of Fact that are recorded and received as real Miracles, which do not require (so far as we can judge) Omnipotency to effect them. And what does not require Omnipotency or an Infinite Power to effect it, may be effected by some Finite Power, or some Created Being: Seeing God can Create all possible Orders of Finite Powers, or Finite Beings. Neither is it thought reasonable, or decent, to call in Omnipotency upon an unnecessary Occasion: According to the

the usual Rules, *Deus non redundat in superfluis, nec deficit in necessariis, & Frustra fit per majora, quod fieri potest per minora.* There are some Miracles indeed, that require Omnipotency; whereof, we shall have occasion to speak hereafter: But, I believe, of those that have been wrought upon the Stage of this World, many do not, but were executed by Angels, Good or Bad, or by other Created Powers.

It may be, you will say, 'Tis true, many Miracles have been Transacted by the Ministry of Angels; but the Power was from God. All Power indeed, Natural or Supernatural, is originally from God: But I speak of their Natural inherent Power, and judge that sufficient to produce such extraordinary Effects, upon Gods Command or Permission. God may appoint, who, or what he pleases, as a Ministerial, Subservient, and Instrumental Cause to put those miraculous Facts in execution: But the Question is only concerning the proximate Efficient Power, Whether that is always immediately from God, either by using his own Power only, or by adding a Transient Supernatural Power to those Agents or Instruments? This we think is not necessary in all Miracles, but that the Divine Commission or Permission, is sufficient in many Cases, without any further Divine assistance or superaddition to the Natural Power of the immediate Agents.

Those that are of a contrary Opinion, think a Divine Omnipotent Power necessary to work a Miracle, because the Laws of Nature are broken or superseded in every Miracle: And no less Power, say they, can break those Laws, than what did at first make and establish them; and that was Omnipotency. In what sense this is true; we shall consider hereafter, when we come to distinguish Miracles, and distinguish the Laws of Nature: In the mean

mean time, to pursue our Argument, let us consider what miraculous Facts there are Recorded in Scripture, which may be warrantably ascrib'd to the Activity of Good or Evil Angels.

To begin with the Bad, and so proceed and argue, *a fortiori*, for the Power of good Angels.

Transportations thro' the Air, are accounted Miraculous, as that of *Ezekiel*, Cap. 8. 3. and 11. 24. to and from *Babylon*: Of *Philip* to *Azotus*, Act. 8. 39. 40. As these Transportations are said to have been from the Spirit of God, so the Evangelist tells us, the Devil Transported our Saviour from the Wilderness, and set him upon a Pinnacle of the Temple, and from thence carried him to the top of an exceeding high Mountain: If these were all local Translations thro' the Air, they must all, if any, be accounted Miracles. The Representations made in Scripture of the power of the Devil in these Regions, give us reason to believe that it is very great. He is call'd the *Prince of the Air*, and the *Prince of this Sublunary World*. This must needs import a great Power over the Elements, and, by Divine Permission, over the Bodies of Men. He smote *Job* with horrible Pains and Sores; and possesses the Bodies of those we call *Demoniacs*; commands all their Organs, and gives them such Motions as cannot be perform'd by the natural force of the Persons that suffer them. Then the Children of the Devil (as *St. Paul* Nam'd *Elymas* the Sorcerer) Magicians, Sorcerers, Wizards, and such as deal with Evil Spirits: The wonders which they do, cannot Reasonably be imputed to a Divine Assistance; nor can we think of them otherwise, than of things that exceed all Humane Power, and are unaccountable to us from natural Causes. I am not forward to believe every Story that is told of these Wonder-workers; but seeing they are plainly and frequently tak-

en Notice of in the Sacred History, and their matters of Fact, both in *Egypt* and *Babylon*, and even in *Judea*, recorded and made known to us; besides, considering there were Laws made against them by *Moses*, and complaints often by the Prophets, I cannot look upon these things as Chimerical. It wou'd be a hard censure and injudicious, to make or suppose all such Reproofs, Threatnings, Laws and Constitutions, Directed against Fictitious or Imaginary Persons and Practises; and still more Incongruous, to suppose that these Apostates from God, and Confederates with the Devil, should be enabled by a Special Divine Assistance, to do such strange and extraordinary Works: This would be in a manner to Authorize and Protect them. When the *Jews* told our Saviour, that *he cast out Devils, by the Prince of Devils*; our Saviour answer'd, *Luk. 11. 18. If Satan be divided against himself, how shall his kingdom stand?* So in reference to the Kingdom of God, such a supposition would make God to be divided against himself; to put Weapons into the Hands of his Enemies, and to lend them his Forces to fight against himself.

If further evidence be requir'd of this power of Satan to work Miracles, (either immediately by himself, or by those Miscreants his Instruments) we may further consult the History of the New Testament. The *Jews* to be sure were of this opinion, in the foremention'd place, when they imputed our Saviour's Miracles to the power of *Beelzebub*. Neither doth our Saviour in his answer deny such a power in *Beelzebub*; but he gives them a good reason why the Miracles he wrought could not proceed from any Diabolical power. Our Saviour also told the *Jews* of *False Prophets*, and *Pseudo-Messiahs* that would come and shew great *Signs* and *Wonders*. *St. Paul* in like manner to the *Thessalonians*; and *St. John* in

in his *Apocalypse*, speak of the wonders and Miracles which Antichrist will work. And St. Paul saies expressly, whose coming is according to the working or energy of Satan, with all power, and signs, and lying wonders. This Energy of Satan cannot be interpreted a Divine Energy, or deriv'd immediately and Supernaturally from God; But must be the natural power of that Evil Spirit, excited by his Envy to Christ, and his Malice to Mankind. Accordingly the Christian Fathers, when they have occasion to speak of these Miracles of *False Christs* or *Antichrists*, make them the pure Works of the Devil and of his Instruments: by Divine Permission indeed, but not by Divine Concurrence and Efficiency. And it would seem irreverent, to say no more, to interest God the Father against his Son, by giving an extraordinary assistance to those works of the Flesh and the Devil, which he sent his Son on purpose to destroy.

These evidences we have in Sacred History concerning the Power of Evil Spirits, in reference to this Subject of Miracles. Other Arguments may be taken from Gentile History, in their Oracles, and several ways of Divination. Tully in his Book *De Divinatione*, hath argued the case on both sides: And in the beginning makes bold to say, *nullam quidem Gentem video, neq; tam humanam atq; doctam, neq; tam immanem, tanq; Barbaris qua non Significari futura, & a quibusdam intelligi pradicique posse censet.* I am not fond or hasty in receiving all that is reported concerning Oracles or Divinations, there may have been many Tricks and Cheats in them; yet I think it would be an ungrounded incredulity to reject them all in a Lump, without any Reserve or Discrimination. 'Tis certain, in those days of Gentilism and Idolatry, the Devil had a great Power upon Earth, before the coming of our Saviour. And even now amongst the Barbarous Nations,

Northern

Northern or American, we see too many remains of it. However if there was any reality in what is reported by Ancient Authors concerning the Gentile Oracles, their Consecrated Statues, their wonderful Cures, and their Divinations; seeing these were all a support of Idolatry and Polytheism, to ascribe them to God, to his special Act and particular Assistance, seems to me an Indignity offer'd to the Divine Majesty. Let us now consider the Good Angels :

One may safely conclude, that the Power of Good Angels is not less than the Power of the Evil Angels: If therefore we have prov'd that Evil Angels may work Miracles, we must allow an equal or superiour Power to the Good : And this their power may be call'd a *Divine Power*, as oppos'd to *Diabolical*, and as distinguish'd from *Humane*. This being admitted, and that these Good Angels act by a Divine Commission, The question is only, whether in several cases, their Natural Power (without any Supernatural Concourse) be not sufficient to execute that Commission, and to produce an effect really Miraculous ? This we think is fairly possible : As when a Prince sends Orders to his Army, to assault such a Town, or give Battle to the Enemy, 'tis the Soldiers, by their Arms and Swords, and Personal Force, that execute this Order: The Prince gives no personal Assistance, but Authority only. The Angels are the Host's of Heaven, and they Execute the Commands of their Lord and Sovereign, so far as is within the compass of their Power : And we have Reason to Believe that many Miraculous, Facts are so. As suppose in some of *Elisba's* Miracles, when he made Iron Swim on the Surface of the Water, or Cur'd the Poison'd Pottage that was for the Sons of the Prophets; and at another time an unwholesome Spring: These and such like Facts can never be prov'd to

exceed Angelical Power, yet were real Miracles, and so ever accounted. What shall we say of *Divine Dreams*, whereof we have frequent mention in Scripture: Is it not in the Power of an Angel so to modify the Brain, our Imagination and Idea's, as to represent to us such or such Sounds, Persons, or other Objects? These admonitions in Dreams are sometimes said expressly to have been made by Angels; as to *Joseph* several times, *Mat.* 1. 13, 19. and to *Jacob* when he left *Laban*, *Gen.* 31. 11. We read in Sacred History many Miraculous Facts done by Angels, both in a way of *Saving* and *Destroying*. When the Prison Doors were open'd, and the Apostles set at liberty, 'tis said expressly to have been done by the Angel of the Lord, *Act.* 5. 19. And when *St. Peter* was by *Herod*, committed to Prison, he was deliver'd by an Angel; a Light shining in the Prison, his Chains fell off; and the great Iron Gate of the City, as he went along with the Angel, open'd to them of its own accord, *Act.* 12. And the same *Herod* was struck to Death soon after by an Angel, and eaten up by Worms. So the two Angels struck the *Sodomites* with Blindness, *Gen.* 19. The destroying Angels slew all the First-born of *Egypt* in a Night: And in a Night an Angel slew One Hundred Fourscore and Five Thousand *Assyrians* in the Camp of *Sennacherib*. These and such like Miraculous Facts we find to have been perform'd by Angels: Such Facts as are above Humane Power, and above the Ordinary Powers of Nature.

Thus much hath been said, to show that Omnipotency, or an immediate Divine Power is not requir'd to work every Miracle: And that Angels, Good or Bad, may be the proximate Efficient Causes of a Miracle: These by Divine Commission, the other by Divine Permission. We now come to consider the Arguments alledg'd against

gainst our Opinion ; or to prove, That no Miracle can be wrought, but by the immediate Operation of God, or by a Supernatural Assistance to those Agents that visibly produce them. The grand reason they give for their Opinion, is this : In every Miracle, the Laws of Nature are broken ; but no less Power, say they, can break the Laws of Nature, than what at first established them, which was the Omnipotent Power of God, the Author of Nature. This looks plausibly ; but we must consider, what is to be understood by the *Laws of Nature*, what their differences are, and how far indispensable. We must also distinguish *Miracles*, and consider their differences, whether Gradual or Specific, if I may so name them : And that which has cast obscurity upon this Subject of *Miracles*, is, in my Opinion, the want of these Distinctions, and their due Application.

As to the Laws of Nature in respect of Bodies, there are two general kinds of them ; such as respect their *Essential Properties*, and such as are concerning their *Accidental Modes*. Those that concern the Essential Properties of Bodies, cannot be chang'd or revers'd by any other than an Omnipotent Power, such as made them. But the other that concern the Accidental Properties or Modes of Bodies, may be overcome by less Causes, provided they be sufficient to overpower the first Tendancy, or Reluctancy of Nature. For instance, Every Body endeavours to continue in the State it is in ; and being in Motion, tends forwards into a right Line. Heavy Bodies naturally descend, and Light ones ascend. These are all general Laws of Nature, but they may be check'd and controll'd by a less Power than Omnipotency. Every Stone we throw into the Air, puts a force upon Nature, and breaks through the ordinary Law of Gravity:

And Bodies amongst themselves, change one anothers State and Form, and time of Motion, according to their different strength: But it is not so, as to the Essential Properties of Bodies. To make a Body be at once in several Places; or to penetrate another Body; or to Exist without Extention; or *Modes* to Exist without a *Subject*: These are such changes, as neither Bodies can effect amongst themselves, nor Man, nor Angel, nor any Created Power: If yet they come into the Number of possibilities. Such changes would Intrench upon, and Reverse the Primary and Fundamental Laws of Nature; but the *Secondary Laws* that relate to the Modes and Accidents of Bodies, are not so inflexible: They are the *motus primo-primi*, as I may so say, the Offers, Propensions, or Tendencies of Nature; but may be easily interrupted and overborn. There is room enough left for the exercise of Power, not Supream only, but also Subaltern, notwithstanding these Laws of Nature. Suppose an Angel (which is but a reasonable Supposition) can change the Figures of the Parts and Particles of Matter, can change their Size, their Motion, their Situation, and that in several ways, and several degrees; What a great Power must this Angel have upon Matter? For these radical Properties, are the Foundation of all Forms and Qualities, and Diversity of Operations in particular Bodies. They may act upon the Humours of our Bodies, or the Vertues of other Bodies, and especially upon their own Bodies, if they have any; to make them visible, or invisible, at pleasure. To condense them into the Shape of an Humane Body, or to rarify them into Light and the form of a Star. By a like Power over the *Ether* and the Elements, they may raise or repress the force of Fire, Air, Water; and also change

change their Qualities and Constitution in several ways.

These general Remarks, I think are sufficient to show, That the Laws of Nature, that relate to the accidental Modes of Matter, may be alter'd by a less Power than Omnipotency, and yet those Alterations be Miraculous to us; which will further appear, when we have in the next place distinguish'd Miracles according to their Order.

The usual distinction of Miracles is into *True* and *False*, which I think is no proper Division: For every Miracle, is a Miracle; and a false Miracle, is no Miracle; whereas, in a regular Division, both the *Species*, or both the Parts should be contain'd under the *Genus*. If we should divide Motion, into *True* and *False* Motion, we should think it incongruous; but we might distinguish it into *real* and *apparent* Motion; for there seems often to our Senses, to be motion in a Body, when really there is none. As when the Shore seems to move to those that Sail by it; and the Sun to us upon the Earth; and the like happens in several other Cases. I should therefore, rather chuse to distinguish Miracles into *Real* and *Apparent*; That distinction relating more to us and our Senses, than to the Nature of the thing; as the other distinction of *True* and *False* seems to do. But if Use and Custom have Authoriz'd either, or both of those distinctions; 'tis enough when we use them, to signify in what Sense we would have them understood.

These are not the Distinctions we intend to insist upon; Miracles, we think may be distinguish'd into *Absolute* and *Relative*. An absolute Miracle, is that which is so Universally, to all Orders of Created beings, high or low, without Exception; as being the immediate Act or Effect of Omnipotency, of an Infinite Power, and

and such as cannot be wrought by any other. A *Relative* Miracle, is a Work above the Power of those Creatures to whom it is Exhibited, and above the ordinary Course of Nature with them; yet not above the Power of all Created Beings. A Work that exceeds all Humane Power, is so far a Miracle to us, but may not be so to Angels. And what exceeds the Power of a lower order of Angels, is a Miracle to them; yet may not be so to a Superior Order, much less to the Supreme. I do not conceive the Notion of a *Miracle* to consist in *Indivisibili*; nor that the same degree of Power, or an equal, is requir'd to every Miracle. Where Omnipotency is requir'd, as in Creation, Annihilation, Resurrection from the Dead, and others of that force; these have no Degrees, they are absolutely and universally Miraculous without any Restriction. But what may be produc'd by a less Power than infinite, may yet be a real Miracle *Relatively*; namely, with respect to those Created Beings, whose Power does not extend to the Production of such an Effect, nor their Knowledge to comprehend and explain its Origine from Natural Causes. 'Tis true, there are several Effects in Nature, whereof we cannot give a just Account from their Causes, and yet we do not think them Miracles, if they be constant or customary, and have not any particular occasion or signification. Such collateral reasons may induce us to believe, That they come to pass, according to the ordinary course of Providence, though in ways unknown to us. We do not here design to examine any single Effect or *Phenomenon*, to determine, whether That, in particular, be or be not, Miraculous: But we say, whatsoever is really such, proceeds from a Supernatural Power; and yet, not always and necessarily from

from an Omnipotent or Infinite Power, immediately in the execution of it.

However, we are willing, either to give or to take the best Directions we can, *how* to judge of Miracles in general, or particular; or how to distinguish *Real* Miracles from *Apparent* only. This is a difficulty common to every *Hypothesis*; and every one is bound, whatsoever his Notion of a Miracle be, to find out the best Expedients, and to take such Measures and Cautions, as may best secure us against Impostures. If you take Omnipotency to be the necessary Character of a Miracle, or the only Power that can produce it, Then the Question will be, *What* Effects require an Omnipotent Cause? Which in some particular Cases, may be hard to resolve. If you make every thing that is above Humane Power, and the ordinary course of Nature, to be a Miracle; Then you must consider, *what* Facts or *Phenomena* exceed all Humane and Natural Powers. This will bring in a multitude of *Quere's* about Blazing Stars, and Earthquakes; Irregular Seasons, and Irregular Tides; Extraordinary Meteors; and what we call *Prodigies* and *Omens* of all sorts; which may be rather Enquiries of Curiosity, and Philosophical Disquisition, than Theological: Wherein the Vulgar and the Learned may be of different Opinions. The principal thing wherein we are concerned, is to know, what unquestionable Miracles are wrought by Divine Commission; what by Permission only, for reasons best known to Providence. Every Miracle indeed, may be said to be wrought by Divine Pleasure, either *positive* or *permissive*: But the execution of it, may be perform'd by an higher or lower Power, as it pleases GOD. And if the inherent Natural Power of the Agent be sufficient (as it is in many Cases) to produce the Effect; there needs no more, but the

Word

Word of Command, or Concession. If it be insufficient, then 'tis a bare Instrument or Organ that is Acted, and Operates by a Superiour Power, which, in reality, is the cause of that Effect. However, both, as to the Authority and Reality of Miracles, we ought to consider, not only the bare Matter of Fact, but the manner wherein it is done, and all circumstances that attend it, whether *Moral* or *Physical*. Those Miracles that are wrought to give Testimony to some Doctrine; to some Object or form of Divine Worship, are of all most considerable; and herein the Miracles of our Saviour and of *Moses*, are most conspicuous; where both the singularity of the Facts, the Number of them, the manner of Performance, the Circumstances, Consequent and Antecedent; or any other Characters you can desire of real Miracles, meeting together, manifestly show their Divine Original and Authority.

In judging of Miracles and their Divine Authority, I take it to be a consideration of great moment, that we observe their *Tendency* and *Purport*: What Message they bring, what Doctrine they introduce, or confirm, or propagate. 'Tis usually propos'd as a Question of Importance upon this Subject, *Whether* we are to judge of *Miracles* by the *Doctrine*, or of the *Doctrine* by the *Miracles*? I answer, we are to judge of them in Conjunction, and Reciprocally, as they give light and evidence to one another, being compar'd together. *Miracles* and *Doctrine* are not to be separated, nor either of them excluded from the Trial. Many true Prophets wrought no Miracles, and yet their Doctrine was true: And many false Prophets may work Miracles, and yet their Doctrine not be true. If a Miracle be wrought to introduce or confirm Idolatry, Impiety or Immorality; and in proportion any other Doctrine contrary to the Divine Nature, At-
tributes

tributes and Perfections, we have Reason to believe, that such a Miracle is not of Divine Authority, nor wrought by a Divine Power. And we have the Warrant and Directions of Moses not to hearken to such Miracle workers, nor follow their Doctrine. *If there arise among you a Prophet, or a Dreamer of Dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder: And the sign or the wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto thee, saying, Let us go after other Gods (which thou hast not known) and let us serve them: Thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that Prophet, or that Dreamer of Dreams: For the Lord your God, proveth you, to know whether you love the Lord your God, with all your Heart, and with all your Soul, Deut. 13. 1, 2, 3.*

This Precept shows us that a Miracle may be wrought by a Power that is not Divine. nor by a Divine Mandate: And that we ought to consider the Message or Doctrine as well as the Miracle, when we judge of its Authority. Moses instances in Idolatry and Polytheism, as it was most Proper, speaking to the Jews. St. John speaks more in reference to the Christian Religion, and bids us not to believe every spirit, but try the Spirits whether they are of God. *Because many false Prophets are gone out into the World, John 4. 1.* Our Saviour speaks of False Prophets in general, and tells us we must know them by their fruits, by their Works and their Doctrine. And in the sequel of that Discourse he adds, *Many will say to me in that Day, Lord, Lord, have we not Prophesied in thy Name? And in thy Name cast out Devils? and done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you, Depart from me ye that work iniquity.* Our Saviour does not deny the Facts these Persons Mention, but he denys that they had any Power or Authority from him: *He never knew them.* And his rejecting of them, implies that they might

Mat. 7. 15,
16, &c.
ver. 22,
23.

be workers of iniquity, tho' Workers of Miracles. In his own case, our Saviour refers the Jews (when they suspected him to have to do with Evil Spirits) to the Nature of his Doctrine, as an argument that his Power of working Miracles was not from Satan. And his discourse about False Prophets generally Terminates in that Rule, *By their Fruits you shall know them: The Tree is known by its Fruit, Sound or Corrupt.* And what Fruits are Sound or Corrupt, we cannot better know than by comparing them with the Fruits of the Divine Spirit, which are in *all Goodness, Righteousness and Truth*, Ephes. 5. 9.

These moral things therefore (besides the naked Facts) must be attended to, in our judging of *Miracles, Prophecies, Revelations*, or whatsoever pretends to Divine Authority, upon a Religious account, and for our instruction. All Religion (whether Natural or Instituted) must have some Basis to stand upon; and that Basis is the *existence* of God, and the *Nature* of God; here by the Nature of God, I do not mean only *Power and Knowledge*. That is too narrow a Basis to found true Religion upon; Those Attributes may breed Fear, but not Love: Nor can they alone ever assure us that we are not impos'd upon by Miracles or Revelations. We may from Miracles conclude, that there is some Powerful and intelligent Being Superior to Man, but how he will treat us, whether he may not have a design to delude us for his Pleasure, we cannot be assured from those properties only. We must also include in the Nature of God what we call his *Moral* or more Sacred Attributes; That he is a *Just and Good Being, True, Faithful, Holy and veracious*: And comparing with these the Doctrine reveal'd and attested by Miracles, we may the more certainly judge whether it be from God or no.

According

According to my thoughts, we are to consider, both in Nature and in extraordinary Providences, *Final* causes, as well as *Efficient*; not only by what means, but also for what ends, they are brought to pass. How they are Witnesses of the Divine Goodness, Justice and Holiness, as well as of his Power and Wisdom. The more perfections of God appear in his works, Natural or Supernatural, the more perfect Image they make of the Divinity: And give us a fuller Evidence and Demonstration of the Existence and Nature of God, and a further Subject of Praise and Adoration.

Having made these short remarks and enquiries concerning Miracles, we may now return and reflect upon that notion of a *Miracle* which we propos'd at the entrance of this Discourse. To see what Amendments we can make to our First thoughts. One thing I must take Notice of, which some may look upon as an Omission; Namely, that in describing a *Miracle*, I have not express'd one property of it; *That it must be something expos'd to our Senses*; that is, to our outward Senses. 'Tis true, I have not, neither was it done through inadvertency, but because I thought there were Miracles wrought within us as well as without us, as *Inspiration, Divine Dreams and Visions*, or what else is represented and apply'd immediately to our understanding or imagination: But whatsoever Miracle is wrought upon an *External Object*, must be externally sensible; otherwise how shall the Spectators or Auditors perceive it? If they can observe no change in the Object, the pretended Miracle is lost to them, and all the vertue of it.

We gave but two properties to a Miracle in general That it must be the Work of a Power Superiour to Man, and, Superiour to Nature; so far, as we understand Natural Causes. What falls short of these two Qualifications, cannot

cannot pretend to be a Miracle; and nothing can exceed them, taken in their full Extent; for they reach as high as Omnipotency, and take in all intermediate Powers betwixt GOD and Man. That these intermediate Powers are not to be excluded, as incapable of working Miracles, we have brought fair Evidence, both to show it *possible*, from the Consideration of the Power of Angels, over the Secondary Laws of Nature; and *Actually* done, and to be done, according to Scripture History and Prophecy. We did not think it sufficient, to define a Miracle; *A Work above Humane Abilities*: For tho' that be certainly true, yet it does not seem to be just and commensurate; for most of the Works of Nature are inimitable to us; and in that respect above Humane Power: Many of them also, are by us, inexplicable as to all their Causes, and the manner of their Operation; and in that respect, above our *Knowledge*. Yet we do not usually place all such Effects in the Rank of Miracles, if from other Considerations, we judge them to proceed from natural Causes, tho' above our distinct Comprehension.

After these Reflexions upon the *properties* of a Miracle in general, it remains only to review the other part of our Discourse, about the *Differences* and Distinction of Miracles, and so conclude. Several Nice Questions will hang upon this Subject of Miracles, howsoever Stated. But seeing they are common, more or less, to every Hypothesis; every one must contribute what they can, to the Resolution of them, wherein I pretend only to bring my *Quota*. First, to distinguish *Real* Miracles from *Apparent* or *Delusory*; And in real Miracles, which of them are perform'd by *Angelical Powers*; and which of them by a *Supreme*. And of those that fall under Angelical Powers, which belong to *Good Angels*, which to *Evil*.
Such

Such Questions, I say, are incident in some measure to every Hypothesis, concerning Miracles: And so far as they are of use, we must try in what Method they may best be answer'd; and how far some will remain dubious, by reason of the shortness of our Knowledge and Understanding.

There seem to be two sorts of Fallacious and Delusory Miracles: one that imposes upon our Senses, and the other upon our Judgment. In both, the thing is not really what to us it appears to be; and therefore, we must be the more cautious in considering both the *Facts* and the *Circumstances* of them. And that both *Physically* and *Morally*. This is a general Direction, which must be apply'd in the Examination of particular Cases. It will not be easie to assign a single Rule or *Criterion*, that will equally serve upon all Occasions; seeing we do not know the Bounds and full Extent of Humane Art, and of Natural Causes so well, as to say, *Thus far you may go, and no farther.* Yet tho' we do not know the just point of their hight, we are sure there are some Effects so great and remote, that they cannot reach them. As in other like Cases, if you ask concerning the works of Nature, how far the *Mechanical Powers of Matter and Motion* can go; If we cannot set a Term that will precisely measure and determine their extent, we may be certain however that they cannot reach to *Cogitation*, or the *Formation* of the *Bodies of Animals*; These, and many more, we know are Effects that must proceed from Higher Powers: In like manner, we cannot in every Occurrence distinguish what we call *Chance* or casualty (that is, an unknown concourse of Natural causes) from a *particular Providence*. What Calamities, National or Personal, are Divine Judgments? What Prodigies are or are not significative: How
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to distinguish Modern Prophecies that pretend to Inspiration, from truly inspir'd. In these and such like things, the Indications are sometimes more clear, sometimes are more obscure. We must observe what Signatures they have, what Testimony they bear in themselves, or receive from without; and accordingly, form a Judgment concerning them. The Summ is, we are not Omniscient, nor in any proximity to it, we are Fallible Creatures, both as to our outward Senses, and our Judgment; Obnoxious to Error and mistake, in both ways. We must therefore watch, and stand upon our Guard; be circumspect and cautious, especially in Matters relating to Religion. Our Saviour bids us more than once, *Take heed that no Man deceive you*, in reference to false Prophets and lying Miracles. Examine before you assent, and take the best light you can, both from Reason and Revelation, to serve you from Impostures and Delusions.

The Second Question is, how we may distinguish betwixt Miracles that are wrought immediately by an Omnipotent Power, and those that are wrought by Angelical Power. So far as this, relates to good Angels; I look upon it as an unnecessary Question: For whethersoever the immediate Cause be, seeing they are both wrought by Divine Authority, they are Sacred to us and irrefragable. As to the Miracles of our Saviour, seeing his Power was unlimited, we cannot determine what degrees of it he was plas'd to use in all particular Cases.

But to be a little more particular in the Explication of those general Heads we mention'd above for the trial of Miracles, the *Facts* and the *Circumstances* of them; I need not promise, That the same Fact may, or may not be a Miracle, according to its Circumstances

ces. A Fever, by Art and Remedies, may be cur'd without a Miracle; but to be cur'd by a Touch, or at a distance, without so much as a touch, by a word speaking, is certainly Miraculous. Water may be turn'd into Wine by due time, in a fit Soil, and the influence of the Sun: But that Water, standing in Jars of Stone, without Soil or Sun, should be converted into Wine, and that instantaneously, cannot be imputed to any Natural Power. As to *Moral* Circumstances, we must first consider, what instructions any Miracles or the Authors of them, that pretend to be Messengers from God, bring along with them. To what Embassy those Miracles are Credentials: What are the Contents of that Writing to which they would be a Seal. The Apostles, tho' they wrought Miracles to confirm their Doctrine, yet commend those that were farther inquisitive, to search and see, whether those things they Taught, were *True*. And as our Saviour says, His Works testify of him; so he would have them search the Scriptures for a further Testimony. A Revelation establish'd by unquestionable Miracles, becomes a Standard or Test, to try Revelations or Miracles; and Natural Religion, pure and sincere, is so far a Test to other Religions, That they must not be contrary or destructive of it. These Rules will help to direct us, as to such Miracles, as bring a Message along with them, or signify any thing New: And those that have no signification (if there be any such) are but Speechless Wonders, or Dum Shows, wherein we are not concern'd in point of Religion.

As the Facts, so also, we must consider the Characters of the *Persons* that pretend to work Miracles; their probity and integrity; That they be free from any worldly designs, vain Glory, affectation of singularity or popular Admiration: Such Persons are less suspicious

or

or subject to delude or be deluded. Then we must consider, how their works are attested; whether they be such, whereof we are Eye witnesses our selves, or take them upon trust, and from the report of others. The Witnesses must both be honest and judicious Persons: Those that are credulous, superstitious, or designing, are not proper and competent Witnesses in such Cases. Besides, we must observe, whether they were done publicly before a multitude, and a mix'd multitude of different Perswasions and Inclinations, Friends and Enemies: According to these Circumstances, the Testimonies have more or less weight, and there is more or less room for Delusion. It will also be proper to consider, whether such works appear'd, where and when, Miracles were necessary, or might reasonably be expected; or did only Service to a Party; not to Christians in general, or Mankind in general. There are some Solemn Times and Seasons, some grand occasions, where in we may reasonably expect, that Divine Providence should appear by Extraordinary Signs and Wonders, to signify with more assurance, the Will of GOD to us, as in Planting a New Religion, or changing one formerly instituted. But when that is accomplish'd, tho' I wou'd not exclude all other unforeseen occasions; however, we have reason to be circumspect and cautious, how we trust to the appearances of Miracles, when we see no just occasion for them. We may also add, what every one will acknowledge, That a *Transient* Wonder or two, that appear like a Phantasm, and will not stay to be felt and examin'd, may be fallacious, or more easily fallacious, than a continu'd Set and Series of Miracles (such as were those of Christ and *Moses*) that stand trial and review, and have lasting Effects to all Posterity. Many Threads
make

make a stronger Cord, and a Constellation gives more light than a single Star.

The Third Question is, how to discover what Miracles are wrought by the power of *Evil Spirits*? What we said for the discovery of fallacious and delusory Miracles, must also be made use of, and apply'd here. For the Devil is the great Cheat and Jugler; and can counterfeit Miracles with more Art and Cunning, than any of the Sons of Men. We suppose also, that he may, with Divine Permission, Work real Miracles; things above Humane Power; and above, or against the Course of Nature. And such things sometimes, he or his Attendants may doludicrously, for the ostentation of his Power, and the amusement of Mortals: Let such things pass for Vanities, when they have no other end or signification. But when his Miracles are wrought with a design to lead us into some pernicious Error, to Countenance an Impostor, or false Doctrine in matter of Religion, we must then be aware and *stand against the wiles of the Devil*. We are forewarn'd of this in one particular of great consequence, I mean the *Miracles of Antichrist*, which St. Paul and St. John foretold and presignifi'd to us. Now the marks of Antichrist being also declar'd to us by the same Apostles, by those instructions we are presum'd to be fore-arm'd against his Temptations. Those that are satisfied where that Anti-christian Power resides, will not be shaken in Mind or Faith by any Miracles that come from that Quarter. We have a more *sure word of Prophecy*, and the Scriptures for our Guide. Those indeed that are not satisfi'd in that point, will be in more Danger of being seduc'd by Miracles brought to confirm Lyes. However it may be to them an occasion of reflecting upon those Doctrines and Practices, which such Miracles would

promote, and if they find the Doctrines false, and the Practises unwarrantable, that may open their Eyes, and turn to their Good what was intended for Evil.

'Tis in the Trial of Miracles as in other Tryals, suppose Murder, or any other Crime, when it doth not appear openly who is the Author of it, we take all the evidence we can, proofs or presumptions, and by a just compare of all things, Judge and Pronounce this or that Person to be the Author of it. But in case of a contest 'twixt Good and Evil Spirits by opposite Miracles, we have Reason to believe that God will not suffer the Power of Satan finally to overcome: But will appear, and by some signal stroke of his Hand confound the Evil Powers, Vindicate his own Honour, and secure his true Servants from being impos'd upon or Seduc'd.

To conclude this Discourse: To all Men of Sence and Sincerity, The Works of Nature and the ordinary course or Administration of them, are evidently *Providential*; not the effects of Chance or blind Fortune, nor always of Mechanical necessity. But those things that do not surpass (according to our judgment) the ordinary course of Natural Providence, do not fall under the denomination of Miracles. I said *according to our judgment*. For whatsoever they are in themselves, so far as we are concern'd in them, we must use a Judgment of *Discretion*. The same thing, the same effect, the same Phenomenon, may be accounted a Miracle in one Man's opinion, which is not so in anothers. As when two Persons see an Object from different Stations; and in a different Light, they may not agree in their judgment or report concerning it. But still there are some Objects and the qualities of them, wherein all will agree. So it is in respect of Miracles and our apprehensions of them. The common People (as we said before) and the *Naturalists*, may

may differ in their opinions concerning this or that particular Fact, or rare appearance in Nature (whether in the Heavens or the Earth) without any prejudice to the truth of Miracles. Those may think that a Miracle, which the others may ascribe to Natural causes: And without any harm, provided they both acknowledge a Divine Providence in the Government of the World, both Natural and Moral. As those that acknowledge Scripture to be the Word of God, may differ in their exposition of this or that particular place, without offence. So in interpreting Providence and Nature we must take the best rules we can, the best helps and light, and accordingly frame a judgment concerning them: And so far we are blameless tho' we should be mistaken.

Let it then be agreed, as it is amongst all good Christians, that there may be, and have been, Real Miracles: And that those, recorded in Scripture, of *Moses* and the Prophets: And most eminently of Christ and his Apostles, were truly such, and every way of Divine Authority: This being acknowledg'd, I think we may differ inoffensively, in the explication of them as to particular Cases, and as to their Proximate Causes or Agents.

SIR,

Your most

Humble Servant.

FINIS.

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